

Junior/Senior Handbook



THE QUESTION: WHAT'S NEXT?

Life is full of decisions. Some are relatively easy to make, such as what to wear or what movies to see; but making decisions about your future can be confusing. It is difficult to know where to start because there are many things to think about.

While considering your next step, the following 7-step Decision-Making Model will help give you structure, while processing and identifying the necessary information.

Decision-Making Model

Step One: Identify the Decision to be Made

Before you begin gathering information, it is important that you have a clear understanding of what it is you are trying to decide. Think about what you want to achieve and state that as your goal. Some decisions you might be facing could include:

1. What do I want to do after graduation?
2. What will I do to prepare for the next phase of my life?
3. What are my short-term and long-term goals?
4. Where do I want to be in five years and what is the best way to get there?

Step Two: Know Yourself (Self-Assessment)

Before you begin exploring careers and trying to identify jobs and careers which will prove satisfying, you must first get a sense of what makes you YOU – your skills, interests, values and personality characteristics. Your journey of self-knowledge will never end, but to get started, use an interest inventory and other available assessments in the College/Career Center or try Bridges or MyRoad, available for use at school or at home using the MHS password. See page 9 for website addresses, usernames, site ID's and passwords. Questions you may want to ask yourself are:

Skills:

1. What can I do best?
2. What are my strengths and weaknesses?
3. What are my most prominent skills and abilities?
4. What skill do I want to use on the job?
5. What skill do I need to acquire?

Interest:

1. What am I interested in doing?
2. What activities have I enjoyed the most?
3. With what kinds of people would I like to go to school/work?
4. What kind of college/job settings would I enjoy?

Values:

1. What satisfactions do I seek in a career?
2. In what ways must I be challenged and rewarded on the job?
3. In what type of college/work environments would I be happy?

Personality:

1. What personal qualities do I possess that will help me on the job?
2. How will my personal style influence my career choice?
3. How will I get along with my supervisor? Co-worker?

Dream: (Dream BIG. Your crazy idea might not be so crazy.)

1. If I could do anything, what would my life look like?
2. What do I feel passionate about?
3. What will my workday look like 10 years from now?
4. What makes you feel energized or connected?

Step Three: Identify Options

1. Post-Secondary Education
2. Military
3. Workforce
4. Apprenticeships and Internships
5. Self-employment and Entrepreneurship
6. Other



Step Four: Gather Information and Data

1. Examine the information and resources available to you.
2. Visit your counselor, career center, library and the Internet.
3. Network - take advantage of all networking opportunities with peers, recent graduates, parents, staff, college and military reps, business contacts and community members.
4. Identify what additional information and resources you will need.
5. Seek out and utilize new information.
6. Use the Career Connections website for academic and career planning, www.fcps.edu/ss/CareerConnections
7. Seek out learning through experience opportunities (volunteer, job shadow, etc.)

Step Five: Evaluate Options That Will Solve the Problem

1. Identify the pros and cons of each alternative.
2. Identify the values and needs that are satisfied by each.
3. Identify the risks involved with each alternative.
4. Project the probable future consequences of each alternative.

Ask yourself:

1. Will I feel good about this choice? How will my parents feel about it?
2. Will certain risks be involved? Am I willing to take such risks?
3. Will it be satisfying for me? How will I feel about this choice five years from now?

Step Six: Select One of the Options

Based on the information you have gathered and analyzed, you should be able to choose one of the options. Do you have enough information to choose one option over another? If not you might need to do more research. Consult with your parents, counselors, school staff, and experts in your field of interest or other community members. Don't forget to talk with graduates who have experienced a similar option.

Step Seven: Design a Course of Action to Implement the Decision

Having chosen one of the options, you can now begin developing and implementing a plan of action. Confirm that the following have been evaluated:

1. What information or resources are needed to complete each step?
2. What are the obstacles to implementing my decision and how can I overcome them?
3. Identify steps to implement the decision.
4. Identify when to begin and end each step.
5. Identify the information or resources needed to complete each step.
6. Take time to review your course of action and/or change direction if necessary. Remember, not very many courses of action or career pathways are direct. Sometimes it is in the process that we learn what the next step needs to be.

Decision-making is a life long skill, so know you will have a lot of opportunities to practice this important process. The more you are willing to contribute to the process and to be open to the variety of resources and people available to you, the more likely it is you will meet with success! A little luck helps too!

The Answer: “Five Gateways + One”

High school graduation is just around the corner! Most students do not realize that there are different options to consider after high school. These options are called “*gateways*” and are listed below:

- 1. POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**
 - 4 year Colleges and Universities
 - 2 year Colleges and Universities
 - Technical and Professional schools and colleges
- 2. MILITARY**
 - Army Navy
 - Air Force Marine Corps
 - Coast Guard
- 3. WORKFORCE**
 - Full-time permanent jobs
 - Combination of two or more part-time jobs
 - Contract service on short-term basis
- 4. APPRENTICESHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS**
 - Carefully monitored work experiences with intentional learning goals
- 5. SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**
 - Start a business
 - Buy a business
 - Take on a franchise
 - Consult or freelance
- 6. TAKE A YEAR OFF**
 - Work, travel, community service, etc.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PLANNING



Why Go To College?

(Answer: How about...a good job!)

Can't I get a good job now?

Yes, maybe you could, but statistics are against you:

Census Bureau confirms earning power of higher education

Just in case you still had some doubts, the U.S. Census Bureau has released data proving the substantial value of a college education in the United States. Workers 18 and over sporting bachelors degrees earn an average of \$51,206 a year, while those with a high school diploma earn \$27,915. But wait, there's more. Workers with an advanced degree make an average of \$74,602, and those without a high school diploma average \$18,734.

Sometimes it's hard to stay in school if you think you need to be working to earn money. But if you finish high school and go on to college, you'll have a wider variety of jobs to choose from, and you'll earn more – especially in the long run.

But I don't know what career to go into!

If you're having trouble deciding what to do, talk with your school counselor and College Career Center Specialist. Do the Career Interest Inventory on **Family Connection**. And remember, you don't have to know exactly what career you want before you start college; often a year or two of college helps a student explore different subject areas and decide on one.

Doesn't college cost a lot of money?

Think of college as an investment: you spend money now so you can earn more later. Take a look at www.studentaid.ed.gov for information about the federal student aid programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education. You can also call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at **1-800-4-FED-AID** (1-800-433-3243)

Source: U.S. Dept. of Education

WHERE TO FIND COLLEGE INFORMATION?

Information seems to be everywhere: books, magazines, the Internet, newspapers, brochures and mailings. How do you make sense of it all? There are many sources of information you can use.

- ❖ **College Career Center:** One location for information on two & four year colleges, professional and technical schools, websites, financial aid and scholarships, Internet access, books, and college brochures. **Your Blackboard account is updated weekly with up to date information for colleges and careers, jobs, community service, etc.** See Mrs. Rahn, College Career Center Specialist. **The College Career Center website has basic information which is updated yearly.** It is found on the McLean High School home page. The Center is open daily 7:30 am – 3:00 pm.
- ❖ **College Catalogs:** The most complete information about a college's academic offerings. Academic programs are online at the college website.
- ❖ **College Admissions Counselors:** Over 130 colleges and universities visit McLean High School every year in the fall. Dates of visitation are advertised through **Family Connection**, as well as posted outside of Guidance. Students interested in further information about colleges should attend the sessions. The purpose is to gain information and ask questions. Prepare for the meeting by knowing what questions you want answered. Passes are available online through **Family Connection**. Print out the confirmation page and take it to your teacher for permission and signing prior to attending.
- ❖ **College Fairs:** The FCPS fair is held in October at Fair Oaks Mall. A spring fair is also held in April at George Mason University. See the announcement through **Family Connection** and in the Calendar in **Blackboard** for further information.
- ❖ **Books:** Located in the College Career Center, these are valuable sources, along with online resources, of information to begin making your decisions. Handbooks contain basic data about colleges including addresses, phone numbers, financial aid, admissions information, programs and deadlines. Books such as The Fisk Guide to Colleges, The Insiders Guide and The Best 366 Colleges give a more detailed description of the college experience.
- ❖ **Student Search Services:** Both the ACT and SAT registration forms ask information about you which can be sent to colleges. If you choose to answer these questions, colleges for whom you fit a profile will send you literature.
- ❖ **Internet Access/Computerized College Search:** Students use the Internet for college and career searches. **Family Connection** has a college search, as well as College Board, etc. For help see Mrs. Rahn, College Career Center Specialist.
- ❖ **Folks in the Know:** College graduates, parents, teachers, counselors, older brothers and sisters who are in or have graduated from college can describe their firsthand experiences to you. They may also be able to put you in touch with students who have similar interests or faculty members who would be willing to talk with you.

MCLEAN HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE CAREER CENTER

College Career Center Specialist: Mrs. Isobel Rahn

703-714-5755 Isobel.Rahn@fcps.edu

Hours: 7:30am-3:00pm Monday-Friday

<http://www.fcps.edu/McLeanHS>

The College Career Center provides students with information to help them explore educational and career options, make realistic career decisions and establish career goals.

College Information

- College admissions counselor visits (fall)
- College catalogues, reference books, Internet site information
- Grade level units for freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors
- ROTC information
- College files with view books, scholarships, academic programs, etc.
- Bulletin boards with information about testing, issues in the news, college programs

Test Information

- ACT
- SAT
- TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language
- Bulletin board with test information as well as comparison of test choices

Financial Aid Information

- FAFSA and CSS Profile information; U.S. Dept. of Education Publications
- Scholarship information
- Bulletin board with scholarship and financial aid information

Military, Career and Job Information

- Grade level unit for freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors
- Interest inventories, reference books
- Military information
- Bulletin board with career information and job postings (school year and summer)

Summer Programs

- Bulletin board featuring community service, travel, courses, etc
- Files and web sites of a variety of activities

Information is available **on Blackboard and in the College Career Center**. Students are free to stop by the Center during the day. Appointments can be scheduled during the school day for parent/guardian.

SELECTED WEB SITES RELATED TO COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

www.fcps.edu/ss/CareerConnections -FCPS provides a variety of resources for students and their families to assist with career and post high school planning. Some these are web based software programs that require school-specific logins and school Ids. Others are free websites.

www.act.org - Information on the American College Testing Assessment.

www.collegeboard.com - The College Board homepage includes SAT registration.

www.collegeboard.com/ap/creditpolicy - Information about AP credit and placement policies.

www.careercruising.com - Research careers and college; **Spanish version available at site.**
User name: McLean Password: FCPS

www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/univ.html - Links alphabetically to hundreds of college and university homepages.

http://www.aucc.ca/can_uni/index_e.html - Links to Canadian colleges and universities.

<http://www.edonline.com/cq/hbcu/> - Information on Historic Black Colleges

www.petersons.com - Peterson's Guides: includes information on colleges, the application process, and many other links.

www.kaplan.com - Kaplan's homepage with information on colleges, financial aid and test preparation.

www.review.com/college - Princeton Review's page of information, including many practice SAT questions.

www.finaid.org - Financial Aid Information Page: free information on financial aid and scholarships; one of the most comprehensive financial aid sites

www.fastweb.com - Fast Web: financial search through the web, free scholarship search.

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/index.html?src=mr> - U.S Department of Education: information on the FAFSA and federal student financial aid program.

www.salliemae.com - Sallie Mae: information on college costs and financing college.

www.fafsa.ed.gov - Information and application for federal aid.

<https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/> - This site will provide you with information about initial eligibility at NCAA Division I and II member colleges and universities

IS THERE A RESOURCE GUIDE TO COMPARE THE QUALITY OF SPECIFIC MAJORS AT DIFFERENT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES?

The answer is no. However, there are methods a student can use in determining the college that might have the highest quality of instruction for a specific major. *

- Go directly to the catalogs online; look for depth and scope of a program. For example, is the engineering department more theory or more hands-on; is environmental science more science oriented or public policy focused? What are the prerequisites and requirements of the program?
- Email the department and ask questions of particular interest.
- Does the department have national certification?
- Ask the career placement office or department how many of its graduates were accepted into graduate schools and which ones; what corporations recruit on campus?
- How many professors are recognized authorities in their field? How many of them teach undergraduates?
- What are the opportunities for research/internships/co-op experiences?
- Visit the campus and the department you are interested in. Ask pointed questions of students in the departments.
- What are the opportunities for a non-music or non-theater major to participate in music or theater activities?
- If you are planning on majoring in music, drama or visual arts, schedule a lesson and/or attend a class with the professor you would be working with.

BUT, in the end, the best college is the one that fits the student best. Since most students change their major, choosing a school strictly by program may not always work.

**Many thanks to the NACAC list serve for these suggestions.*

MAKING THE MOST OF THE COLLEGE FAIR EXPERIENCE

- Review list of colleges attending in advance
- Prepare a list of questions
- Allow time to talk with as many college counselors as possible
- Bring bag for materials like view books, applications, business cards
- Compare your college fair experience with another student

GLOSSARY OF COLLEGE TERMS

- **The ACT** – Tests of educational development in English, math, reading and science. An optional Writing Test is offered.
- **Accepted** – Hooray!!!! The college wants me 😊.
- **Candidate Reply Date – May 1** – deadline students have to reply without penalty to offers of financial aid and admissions.
- **Deferred Admission** - Student has applied early action or early decision and has not been admitted but put into pool of regular decision students.
- **Denied** – Student has not been accepted for admission 😞
- **Early Action** – Applications are submitted in the fall, usually by November 1st or 15th; students receive notification well in advance of regular spring decisions; decision based on grades through junior year. Not a binding contract; student can continue all other applications. May 1st candidate reply date.
- **Early Decision** – Applications are submitted in the fall, usually by November 1st or 15th; students receive notification early in December; decisions based on grades through junior year. At that time the student agrees by contract to enter that college and withdraw all other applications. If not accepted under this plan, student is usually reconsidered or **deferred** for regular admission.
- **Major/Concentration** – Subject of study in which a student specializes; a series of related courses usually taken in junior and senior years.
- **NCAA Clearinghouse** – In order to participate in NCAA Division I and II colleges, student athletes must submit their transcript, the Clearinghouse “Student Release Form” and ACT/SAT scores. When registering for either test, enter “9999” as one of the college choices to have test scores sent to the Clearinghouse. Transcripts are submitted after 6 full semesters of high school.
<https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/>
- **Open Admissions** – Acceptance is granted to all who apply.
- **Regular Admissions** – Students are required to apply by a fixed date. Decision letters arrive in the spring. Students must reply by May 1st
- **Rolling Admission** – Applications considered as soon as they are received. Notification usually happens in 4-8 weeks, although some colleges/universities may take longer. May 1st candidate reply date.
- **SAT Reasoning Test** – Test of critical reading and math abilities given by the College Board. Writing test required.
- **SAT Subject Test** – Tests include Literature, U.S. History, World History, Math, Bio, Chem, Physics, Language (reading only: French, German, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Spanish), Language (listening and reading: Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish – given only in November).
- **Single Choice Early Action** – Used only at Stanford and Yale. A student can apply to one and only one early action college if applying to one of these institutions.
- **Wait List** – Students who are not admitted with the regular pool of students, but are considered for admission should space become available. Students who are waitlisted should maintain contact with the college to show continued interest. Send any new information, update transcript, inquire about how the wait list is managed, etc.

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

1. **Liberal Arts Colleges**- They tend to develop general knowledge and reasoning ability as opposed to preparation for a particular career.
2. **Universities** – They tend to be a collection of individual colleges, such as the College of Engineering, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Agriculture. A university will usually have a graduate school offering advanced degrees. They will vary in size and tend to offer more majors and have more research facilities than other colleges.
3. **Specialized** – They concentrate their offerings in one or two specific areas such as business, engineering, music or art. Music conservatories fall in this category.
4. **Community Colleges/Junior Colleges** – They are a two-year institution of higher education. Course offerings generally include a transfer curriculum with credits transferable towards a bachelor degree at a four-year college and an occupational or technical curriculum with courses of study designed to prepare students for employment in two years.
5. **Professional and Technical Colleges** – They have a special emphasis on education and training in technical fields. They can offer two-year and four-year degrees. However, not all technical colleges offer a two-year program leading to an associate of arts or science degree.

Community Colleges In Virginia – The Commonwealth of Virginia community colleges are public two-year institutions. High School graduates are admitted with no minimum GPA and SAT or ACT tests are not required for admission. Tuition is low, and there can be time to work. Community colleges offer general education programs that are the equivalent of the first two years of the bachelor's degree program. These are called "transfer" programs and students may then enter the bachelor's degree program at a four-year institution at the third-year level. Many 4-year colleges in Virginia have guaranteed admission programs with Virginia Community Colleges. [Check out the agreements between Virginia's community colleges and over 20 public and private Virginia colleges.](#) In addition, community colleges offer technical programs of study that prepare students for immediate entry into the job market

- **Academic Program** – leads to an Associate Degree in Arts or Science; students can transfer to a four-year college or go out into the workforce.
- **Occupational/Technical Program** – leads to an Associate Degree in Applied Arts; students can go out into the workforce or transfer to a limited number of colleges.
- **Certificate of Proficiency** – leads to job placement.

Five Myths about Community Colleges (from the Virginia Employment Commission)

Myth: Students only attend community college because they can't get in to a four-year university

Fact: Statistics refute this assumption. It may be true that, on average, community college students have lower ACT and SAT scores than university students, but many students attend community college for convenience, family, job, or financial considerations. Community college makes sense, purely for economic reasons. Ore students will use community colleges in the future because of the sheer cost of a university education. Community college students save on tuition and also on boarding because they can live at home during the first two years of college.

Myth: A degree from a community college is not as good as a university degree.

Fact: A community college degree can take you straight into the workforce or to an elite four-year university. Community colleges educate 62% of allied health professionals and over 80% of law enforcement officers and firefighters, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Community colleges are not inferior. It is the first choice for many students because the first two years of college are really exploratory anyway and it costs so much.

Myth: Community colleges are inexpensive, so the education is not high quality.

Fact: Community colleges may be less expensive than four-year universities, but that doesn't mean you sacrifice a quality education. Classes in honors programs at community colleges are smaller than university classes. The curriculum is often more in-depth and there is more open exchange between teachers and students. Community colleges tend to be generic brand, but it's just as good a foundation as starting at a four-year university at half the price. Some community college graduates have gone on to Ivy League schools.

Myth: Community college credits do not transfer to four-year universities.

Fact: The quality of community colleges is getting better all the time. There are more communication (articulation) agreements with four-year colleges for them to award credit for comparable courses taken at community colleges. You need to know what institution you want to attend, pay attention to their requirements, and choose your classes accordingly. The key is careful planning.

Myth: Community colleges have low academic standards.

Fact: While community colleges offer “open admission” that breeds diversity, all courses are not open admission. In fact, students usually have to take placement tests in order to qualify for college-level work. Technical and special programs have high standards and students compete to enroll. The idea that students go to community colleges because they can’t hack it at a four-year university is ridiculous. Community colleges have stringent policies, but also offer students the extra support they need to succeed.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN CHOOSING A COLLEGE?

Just what exactly are you looking for? How do colleges make it on to your final list? The first step in the college admission process is to decide and make a list of what factors are important to you about your college experience.

1. **Size** – Would you feel comfortable on a large campus that offers a wide array of activities, social life, and cultural opportunities, but where you could also get lost in the masses and be just a number in some giant classes? Would you like the smaller and individual attention more prevalent at smaller schools...but maybe have fewer choices? Or would you be happy with a little of both worlds at a medium-sized institution?
2. **Location** – Do you care about the area around your college? You can find colleges of all sizes in big cities, suburbs, small towns and pastures. Can you survive at a college where it's cold from October to April or warm/hot year round?
3. **Major** – Do you know yet what field you'd like to pursue as a major? If you have some idea, check with the colleges to see what they offer. There's no point attending a college that does not offer your major.
4. **Distance** – Do you want to leave home? If so, how far would you like to go? Does it matter how often you get home during your college year?
5. **Academic and Special Programs** – If you want a study abroad program, dance degree or ROTC scholarship and your college does not offer it, why are you applying? Do you need support services?
6. **Student Body & Student Life** – Coed or single sex? What kinds of extra curricular activities are there? Do students have similar goals as you do?
7. **Cost** – Have you talked with your family about financing your college education?

WHAT TRAPS SHOULD I AVOID?

- I'm applying because all my friends are applying there.
- There's only one college that is the right one for me.
- It's as far from home as I can get.
- All colleges are the same.
- I'm going to College Z because everyone in my family went there.
- College Z has a great football team.
- My girlfriend/boyfriend is going there.
- College Y is too expensive.

SOLVING THE PUZZLE, MAKING THE MATCH

The college admissions process is similar to putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It is made up of several pieces which look different from college to college.

WHAT ARE COLLEGES LOOKING FOR?

The first three (3) items listed below are most important to all colleges, usually in the order as presented below. Some colleges are test optional and don't require testing be submitted for consideration. Check the individual college websites for more information on testing.

College admissions counselors may use any or all of the criteria below. **The strength of the transcript is most important.** After the curriculum, the order of importance of each criterion may vary from college to college. Students should be aware of what each college considers important.

1. **Strength of Curriculum/Transcript** – This includes the number of academic or core courses that you have taken; i.e., English, math, social studies, foreign language, and science. The transcript is the first piece of paper looked at by admissions counselors. First, they want to see what courses you took and then how challenging they were.
2. **Grade Point Average (GPA)** – At many admissions offices, the grade on your transcript will be quickly recalculated into an unweighted GPA, with all As worth four points, taking into consideration only the core academic subject areas.
3. **Standardized Test Scores: SAT Reasoning Test, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, TOEFL** – Test scores can be used for admission purposes and/or placement into freshmen courses.
4. **School/Community Activities/Employment** – Colleges deeply desire active students. They want students who do more than just study. **However, do not confuse involvement with volume. What colleges are looking for is that you were truly invested in one or two activities.** Colleges want contributors, not joiners. All of this becomes your resume.
5. **Application Essay or Personal Statement** – Colleges want an essay for a couple of reasons. One is to learn something about you that the rest of your application does not tell them. They are also looking to gain insight into how you write and think.
6. **References/Recommendations** – Colleges use recommendations to learn things about you they won't learn anywhere else.
7. **Awards/Honors** – Usually indicated on both the application and on your resume.
8. **Interviews** – The interview is required by some colleges, but is encouraged by many. This is the only opportunity an admissions counselor has to connect a face and personality with the information he/she has on paper. During the interview, you have two goals: learning about the college and telling the college about yourself.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'LL GET IN?

There are no guarantees in the college admissions process.

Year to year and college-to-college, students are admitted and denied, sometimes in a seemingly undecipherable pattern. The number of applicants and the competitiveness of the applicants change over time. **Colleges have institutional needs like geographic diversity, departmental needs, etc. Students and families have no control over these.**

We suggest that students apply to a wide range of colleges, thereby assuring some degree of choice come the spring.

Researching and realistically comparing the student's list of courses, GPA, and test scores with the profile of the preceding MHS senior class can accomplish this. **Family Connection presents College Compare, College Match and College Scattergrams to help each student.** Reach schools should be held to no more than 2 of the total; target schools 3-4; likely schools no more than 1-2. Do your research early; don't wait until April of your senior year.

WHERE DO I FIT?

Each student needs to compare his/her academic profile (grades & standardized tests ACT/SAT) to the profile of the college in order to begin the process of choosing colleges and universities to research. Adjustments for additional academic and non-academic factors will be made at a later time. These are the three levels of selectivity with shades of “in between.”

- **TARGET (Likely)** - A college or university for which the student’s academic profile (ACT/ SAT & GPA) is similar to the typical freshman (approx. 6:10 chance to get in)
- **REACH (Less Likely)** – Academic profile is significantly weaker, (approx. 1:3 chance to get in)
- **PROBABLE (Most Likely)** – Academic profile is significantly stronger (approx. 9:10 chance to get in)

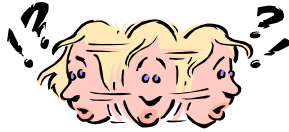
Barron’s Profile of American Colleges, Making a Difference in College Admission

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

Most colleges require applicants for admissions to take entrance exams. The tests used are the **ACT** and the **SAT**. Some colleges require **the SAT Subject Tests** in addition to the **SAT Reasoning Test**, while others may want the **ACT with Optional Writing**. If English is not your native language, the college may request the **TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)** in addition to the previously mentioned tests.

However, there are over 700 colleges and universities who have made these exams optional. You can access this list at www.fairtest.org or see Mrs. Rahn in the College/Career Center.

TO TAKE THE ACT OR SAT?? THAT IS THE QUESTION!



These are significantly different tests, and in many ways measure different skills. Depending on the student's particular strengths and weaknesses, one may perform much better on one test than the other. **Students are encouraged to take both, and then take their best test again.** In 2008, practically every college and university in the U.S. will accept either test. To be sure, check the college website. Both have accommodations for students who qualify. Here are some factors, which may make the difference:

- The SAT has a mandatory writing section; the ACT does not. It is optional.
- The ACT has a science test; the SAT does not.
- The ACT math includes trigonometry; the SAT stops at Algebra II.
- The ACT is entirely multiple choice; the SAT is not.
- The SAT has a guessing penalty; the ACT does not.
- The ACT tests English grammar; the SAT does not.
- The SAT tests verbal and math reasoning skills; the ACT tests what the students have learned in English, reading, math and science.
- The ACT has Score Choice (the student chooses which SET OF scores to submit to colleges); the SAT does not (all scores are sent.)
- The SAT takes 3 hours 45 minutes+; the ACT takes 3 hours.

www.act.org

www.collegeboard.com

CAMPUS VISITS

It would be unfair – to yourself and to the college – to judge a college just on the basis of its viewbook or website. Visiting or revisiting a college campus will help you make the “right” choice for you. While we realize that it can be very costly to visit all the colleges before you apply, it is essential to visit the colleges after you have been accepted and before you make your final decision. If you cannot visit a college or university before you apply, we suggest you go online for a virtual tour. Also remember, we live in the vicinity of many colleges. Taking tours of local campuses can give you a good idea of what you like and dislike in a prospective college.

BEFORE YOUR TRIP:

- ❑ Go online to find information about campus tours and information sessions. There usually are set days and times.
- ❑ If time permits, arrange an overnight stay in the residence hall. Call the Admissions Office.
- ❑ Inquire about an interview with an admissions counselor. Some colleges will not interview at all. If you do get an appointment, be prepared to ask questions. Come with your resume and an unofficial transcript, which you can obtain from your counselor.
- ❑ Arrange an interview in the financial aid office. Ask a lot of questions. Inquire about their financial aid application process, tuition payment plans and work-study programs.
- ❑ Performing Arts majors should contact the department (music, drama, dance) to arrange a lesson or to attend a class. Visual arts majors should arrange for a portfolio review.

WHILE ON CAMPUS:

- ❑ Take a tour and attend an information session.
- ❑ Walk around on your own and talk to students. You may feel bashful, but chances are they are flattered to tell you about their school.
- ❑ Eat a meal on campus.
- ❑ If you have a strong inclination toward a course of study, visit that department. Interview a faculty person. If you are in the science department, check out the labs. What research is going on? Can underclassmen participate?
- ❑ Find the student placement office. Browse through the publications. Where do students find jobs after graduation? How?
- ❑ Pick up back copies of the campus newspaper. They are very revealing about the issues affecting the student body.
- ❑ Pick up last year’s course offerings. While many colleges list hundreds of courses in their catalogue, it is important to find out what they actually offered. Can you get all the courses you need within four years?

AFTER YOU LEAVE:

- ❑ Write down as much information about your visit as you can remember. Include names of people you met.
- ❑ Record your personal impressions of the college – both negative and positive. Did people seem friendly? Stressed? (Exam time does not count.) Did you like the residence halls? Was it easy to get around?
- ❑ Jot down some comparisons with other colleges. Such as “I liked this better at College A than at College B because ...” The more careful notes you take now, the better prepared you will be when it comes time to make a decision.
- ❑ When you get home, set up a college file. One folder or file per school. Every time you receive information from that college, put it in the file. Keep everything together.

What Questions Should I Be Asking?

It is not about asking questions just to ask, but being sure you are making a decision with all the information. Consider what is important to you. Here are some questions you might consider asking in an information session on campus, at a college admissions counselor visit to MHS, or while doing research on line or in books. *

Admissions:

- What are the admissions requirements? Describe a competitive applicant.
- What is the procedure to apply?
- What are the application deadlines?

Academics:

- When do I have to declare a major?
- Do you offer an honors program?
- Do you have a study abroad program?
- What academic support services are available to students?

Cost:

- What are the current expenses for tuition, room, board, and fees?
- What types of financial aid/assistance are available?
- What types of scholarships are available and how do I apply?

Housing:

- What types of housing are available?
- Are freshman required to live on campus?
- Is on-campus housing guaranteed? For how long?

General:

- What is important to your institution? What is your mission?
- How large is the campus (number of students and acreage?)
- Is the campus urban, suburban, or rural?
- Is the campus a “suitcase school” where students leave on the weekends?
- What is the political/social/religious environment like?
- Will I be provided with a computer or do I have to bring my own?
- Can I bring a car?
- How many students return after the first year? How does that compare to other colleges?

Services:

- What opportunities are there to get involved (i.e. clubs, organizations, student leadership)?
- What type of security/safety is offered?
- Is there a health care facility on campus and what services are offered?
- Do you have a job preparation/placement service for graduates?

**Thank you to the James Madison University Take a Look Open House, 11/13/04*

YOUR COLLEGE INTERVIEW

General Interview Tips

- Keep your responses honest! Don't try and fake anything
- Keep cool. Take a deep breath and remain composed.
- If you don't understand the question, ask what the interviewer means.
- Don't pose as an expert on matters you know little about. It's okay to admit you don't know.
- You can say, "I'll have to think that over. Is it okay if I write you about this?"
- Be courteous and tactful.
- Dress appropriately!

**The following questions have been known to open an interview.
Think about how you would answer some of them.**

Questions about your high school experience:

- Tell me something about your courses.
- What courses have you enjoyed the most? Been the most difficult?
- What kind of student have you been? Would this change if you have the chance to do it over again?
- Is your record an accurate gauge of your abilities and potential?
- Is there any outside circumstance that interfered with your academic performance?
- How would you describe your high school?
- What is the range of students at your high school? How do you fit in?
- Do you like your teachers? Who was your favorite and why?

Questions about your extracurricular activities:

- What extracurricular activity has been the most satisfying to you?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school?
- How would others describe your role in the community?
- Do you see yourself as a leader or a worker?
- What do you enjoy doing for fun? Relaxation?

Questions about your community:

- Tell me about your hometown?
- What has been a controversial issue in your community? What has been your position on it?

Questions about college:

- What do you hope to accomplish in the next four years?
- What do you expect to get out of college?
- What interests do you hope to pursue in college?
- Have you thought about a possible major? Why would you like to study that?

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY

Your personal essay (if the college requires one) is an important part of the application process. The essay gives you an opportunity to write about yourself as a unique person. This is not a time to be humble and modest. Your goal in writing this essay is to sell yourself to the college and to gain admission. Your job is to set yourself apart from others in the applicant pool.

Your essay gives admissions counselors an opportunity to evaluate your writing and to make an estimation of your ability to contribute to the life of the college. Remember the personal statement is yours. If it looks like Madison Avenue, the admissions committee will probably assume that it is your mother's or father's or secretary's. A "gimmick" essay rarely goes anywhere. The committee will be amused but unimpressed with your candidacy. Write a serious essay from the bottom of your heart in the most mature manner possible.

ESSAY DOS AND DON'TS –

DO:

- Plan Ahead – Leave time to write and rewrite your essays with time in between.
- Tie yourself to the college: why you are interested in attending, what can the institution do for you. Be specific.
- Read the instructions carefully. **ANSWER THE QUESTION!**
- Consider the unique features of the institution; e.g., a liberal arts college will be impressed with the variety of academic and personal interests you might have, while an art institute would be most interested in your creative abilities.
- Emphasize what you have learned. Show, don't just tell. Remain the focus of your writing.
- Grab the reader from the 1st sentence.

DON'T:

- Force it, be too funny, sad, cute, or silly; e.g., "I enjoy playing the piano and guitar but not simultaneously."
- Be redundant – essays should not be a rehash of information already provided on other parts of the application or on your high school transcript.
- Let modesty cover up your greatest assets and achievements.
- Worry about trick questions. Your readers are genuinely interested in your answers to the questions.
- Be afraid to confess your anxieties or indecisiveness. Admissions counselors enjoy helping people and can be quite moved by the knowledge that you need them.

REMEMBER!

The purpose of an application essay is to communicate a sense of who you are as an individual, what you think about yourself and the world, and how you express yourself. No matter what topic you write about, keep the purpose firmly in mind.

So...be truthful...be yourself...be creative...and in your final draft...be careful.

SAMPLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

(Taken from recent college applications)

What do you see as the turning point(s) or important events in your life and why do you view them as such?

What is the most critical moral, ethical, or social problem facing America?

Describe your ideal of the honorable person. Feel free to use examples.

If you were given the opportunity to spend an evening with any one person, living, deceased, or fictional, whom would you choose and why?

Please cite and discuss a literary quotation or brief passage that has special meaning to you.

We invite you to reflect on an issue or experience that is significant to you or to your perspective on the world around you. We do not ask a specific question or present a topic for this essay because the subject you choose tells us almost as much about you as the way you discuss it.

Describe a situation in which your values or beliefs caused conflict with someone you respect. How was the situation resolved?

RESUME

A resume will be needed for your counselor and colleges. This sample resume has some of the things you may be doing in high school. You may or may not have all or any of these activities. Use the resume feature on **Family Connection** to keep track of your activities. When it is time to write up a formal resume, this format will help to highlight who you are and what you do.


Any Student
anystudent@xyz.com
012-34-5678

Education – McLean High School	9-12
Honors and Awards List the Awards	9-12
Extracurricular Activities – In school	9-12
Out of school	9-12
Work Experience	9-12
Summer Activities	9-12
Skills	
Hobbies	

If you have done any activities which are specific to McLean High School (McLeaders, Project Enlightenment, etc.), or are very special to you, please feel free to add this information at the end of the resume. Do not write things just because you think it will look better. Use this opportunity to inform the admissions committee about these programs. The resume should not be more than two (2) pages.

COLLEGE PLANNING CALENDAR

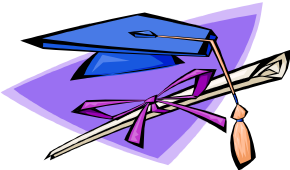
JUNIOR YEAR 2008-2009

<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>	<u>January</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Register for the PSAT/NMSQT ❖ Begin meeting with college admissions counselors in the College Career Center ❖ Begin attending college visits in the MHS Career Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take the PSAT/NMSQT ❖ Attend the College Fair/College Night Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consider taking the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery). Administered all year long. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Attend a financial aid workshop if possible ❖ Students receive results of PSAT/NMSQT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Begin college search and meet with counselor & College Career Center Specialist ❖ Register online for spring ACT/SAT testing ❖ Begin research for summer programs
<u>February</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Register for Senior Classes ❖ Continue research for summer programs: volunteering, working, taking classes, traveling ❖ ACT February 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Begin service academy and ROTC applications ❖ Continue researching summer opportunities ❖ SAT March 14 ❖ Visit colleges 3/17-3/21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Attend GMU College Fair evening ❖ Begin/continue scholarship search (e.g. Internet, Family Connection) ❖ Take the TOEFL if applicable ❖ ACT April 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take Advanced Placement Tests May 4-15 ❖ Take TOEFL if applicable ❖ Begin NCAA Clearinghouse process ❖ Ask for letters of recommendation. ❖ SAT May 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ SAT June 6 ❖ ACT June 13 <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>

SUMMER

- Put together your resume; refer to your resume on **Family Connection**; update as needed.
- Visit colleges
- Visit websites for information and/or applications.
- Begin working on your college essays.
- Search for scholarships; use the Scholarship Database on **Family Connection**.
- This is the year to STUDY. Seek help when you need it.
- Register on scholarship website such as www.fastweb.com

**COLLEGE PLANNING CALENDAR
SENIOR YEAR 2008-2009**

September	October	November	December	January
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Finalize list of colleges ❖ Attend college visits in the MHS Career Center ❖ Start filling out college applications ❖ Get Counselor Data Pack from Bb ❖ Complete ROTC and service academy applications ❖ Complete NCAA clearinghouse forms: www.ncaa.org ❖ File CSS Profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Search for scholarships ❖ Submit early decision/early action applications ❖ Submit requests for recommendations and transcripts ❖ Attend College Fair and College Night programs Oct. 19 and 20 ❖ SAT Oct. 4 ❖ ACT Oct. 25 ❖ Oct. 1 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendation requests (Nov. 1 application deadline) ❖ Oct. 15 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendation requests (Nov. 15 application deadline) ❖ Visit colleges 10/11-13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ SAT Nov. ❖ Schedule interviews or auditions if necessary ❖ Nov. 1 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendations (Dec. 1 application deadline) ❖ Nov. 15 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendation requests (Dec. 15 application deadline) ❖ Start working on financial aid (FAFSA) using 2007 tax data. Apply for PIN online ❖ Complete all applications for regular admission if you've applied early ❖ Visit colleges 11/1-4 <p align="center">VOTE!!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Receive early decision/action reply ❖ Pick up financial aid forms/booklets in the College Career Center – FAFSA, CSS Profile or apply for PIN online ❖ SAT Dec. ❖ ACT Dec. 13 ❖ Dec. 1 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendation requests (Jan. 1 or 2 application deadline) ❖ Dec. 15 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher recommendation requests (Jan. 15 application deadline) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Submit FAFSA after 1/1 – use online application: www.fafsa.ed.gov ❖ SAT Jan. 24 ❖ Jan. 5 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher rec. requests (Feb. 1 application deadline) ❖ Jan. 15 deadline for Counselor Data Pack and teacher rec. requests (Feb. 15 application deadline)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Semester grades mailed to all colleges where applications were sent ❖ Avoid Senior Slump. Final Grades Matter! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lots of scholarships ❖ Avoid Senior Slump – Final Grades Matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Schedule final college visits April 6-10 ❖ Attend spring college fairs and apply to additional colleges if necessary ❖ Avoid Senior Slump – Final Grades Matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take Advanced Placement tests ❖ Notify colleges by May 1st of your decisions. Deposit to only one (1) college! ❖ Avoid Senior Slump – Final Grades Matter 	<p align="center">June GRADUATION</p> <p align="center">CONGRATULATIONS!</p> 

MILITARY OPTIONS

1. SERVICE ACADEMIES

The United States maintains five service academies: the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York; the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland; the United States Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado; the United States Coast Guard Academy at New London, Connecticut; and the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York. The mission of the service academies is to provide the instruction and experience necessary to produce graduates with knowledge, character, and leadership abilities to become career military officers.

Websites:

www.usafa.edu - U.S. Air Force Academy
www.cga.edu - U.S. Coast Guard
www.usmma.edu - U. S. Merchant Marine Academy
www.usma.edu - U.S. Military Academy
www.usna.edu - U.S. Naval Academy

2. RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS (ROTC)

The ROTC program provides you the opportunity to attend a civilian college while studying military leadership as part of a total undergraduate program. ROTC is a college elective, which requires about four hours a week. It is offered at hundreds of campuses. Applications are available upon request from college ROTC units or on the websites.

www.goarmy.com/rotc - Army ROTC www.afrotc.com - Air Force ROTC
www.navy.com/benefits/education/nrotc/ - Navy ROTC

3. MILITARY ENLISTMENT

Opportunities for enlistment in the military are plentiful. The five services offer over hundreds of schools and thousands of courses of instruction. This training and the experience that follows give the military veteran a real advantage in the civilian world.

Enlisting in military service right after high school is an option. The U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard provide job training in many fields, as well as opportunities for enlistees to take some college-level courses. The services can also help you build a college fund.

The U.S. National Guard consists of two components: the Army National Guard (ARNG) and the Air National Guard (ANG). Its mission is to serve the state in times of natural disaster or civil disturbance, and the nation in time of war. Flexible scheduling makes it possible for you to combine service in the National Guard with work or school. The Guard meets one weekend per month and two weeks in the summer. U.S. National Guard also offers educational benefits.

Each service sets its own enlistment qualifications. Contact your local recruiters for information or visit their websites regarding qualifications and program opportunities.

Websites:

www.army.mil – Army www.navy.mil - Navy
www.af.mil - Air Force www.marines.com/ - Marine Corps
www.uscg.mil - Coast Guard www.1800goguard.com/ - National Guard

For additional information see the Military Career Guide at www.todaymilitary.com/careers

THE WORK FORCE

FINDING THE JOB

Successful job hunting refers not only to finding a job, but also finding the best job possible. When employment is plentiful this may not present a problem; but when jobs are scarce, you may have to think creatively and investigate many sources. Listed below are suggested resources:

- Relatives, friends and neighbors
- Counselors and teachers
- High school coordinators of professional technical programs
- Career centers
- Help wanted ads and bulletin boards
- Virginia Employment Commission
- Civil service, county, state and federal agencies
- Private employment agencies
- Walk-in inquiries
- Job fairs
- Trade journals and directories (available in the library)
- Fellow employees
- Contacts made through volunteer activities
- Online job bulletin boards

HOW TO COMPETE SUCCESSFULLY

- Develop a list of businesses that usually hire people with your skills and ask for an interview. Many job hunters use this approach and most get the jobs they want.
- Do not wait for businesses to advertise. Be assertive.
- Do not underestimate smaller businesses. Most of the workforce is employed by small companies.
- Find out what new businesses are opening in your area and when they will begin hiring.
- Target jobs in rapidly expanding fields.

PROFESSIONAL TECHNICAL OPPORTUNITIES

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeship is an employer's training program. It is a time-honored program combining on-the-job training (OTJ) with related instruction (RI). The result is a skilled craftsperson. When you complete both on-the-job training and related instruction, you become a registered apprentice. Registered apprentices completing a full program receive a State Apprenticeship Certificate upon completion. This certificate is nationally recognized. Over 300 employers sponsor more than 1,200 apprentices in Northern Virginia each year.

Examples of Apprenticeship Programs:

- Barbering
- Carpentry
- Cosmetology
- Electricity
- Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning
- Machinist
- Nail Technician
- Office Administrative Support Specialist
- Optician
- Plumbing
- Surveying

Apprenticeship Terms/Definitions

Apprentice: Person 16 years or older, learning a trade with on-the-job training and related instruction in accordance with state and federal apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeship: A certified, structured, well defined program of training that combines supervised on-the-job training skills with related instruction training in the classroom.

Websites

Virginia Community College System

<http://www.vccs.edu/>

Construction Workforce Development Coalition

www.futureforcenow.com

SUMMARY OF THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

- Do the groundwork. Review web pages, seek information, and visit campuses.
- Decide where you wish to apply. Select colleges in more than one category of selectivity.
- Access the Internet for college application and financial aid forms and come to the College Career Center for personal help.
- Check carefully for application deadline dates.
- Take the appropriate admissions tests. Does the college want the ACT with Writing? Are the SAT Subject Tests required for admission or placement? Which test, ACT or SAT, do I do better on?
- Make sure that you meet the admissions requirements for the program you want.
- Narrow your choices of colleges to 8-10... Be realistic.
- Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) starting January 1st and, if needed, the CSS Profile.
- Apply to the institution for financial aid, if interested.
- Apply for local and other financial aid, if interested.
- Confirm admission by sending in required deposit.
- Attend orientation and register for classes.